

**Opening Statement**  
**Representative James A. Leach**  
**Chairman, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific**  
**The United States and Southeast Asia**  
*September 21, 2005*

On behalf of the Subcommittee, I would like to express a warm welcome to Mr. Eric John, who is making his inaugural appearance before the Committee as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. We look forward to your testimony.

We meet this morning to survey recent developments in Southeast Asia, and United States policy toward the region. As the nexus of important political, economic, and strategic factors, Southeast Asia holds great promise and also faces significant challenges. While I know that many of our friends were disappointed that Secretary Rice was unable to attend the ASEAN Regional Forum this past July, I want to assure them that the United States – including the Congress – remains committed to robust engagement in the region.

I hope that our witness will be able to address two broad questions during our discussion today. The first is how best to address the challenges of terrorism and radical Islam: In addition to the transnational activities of Jemaah Islamiya, some countries also face threats from indigenous militants. The second is how the United States should regard the growing role of China in the region. Some observers question whether China's initiatives – such as the East Asia Summit scheduled for December 2005 – are attempts to marginalize U.S. influence.

In addition to these general, region-wide dynamics, I hope that today's hearing might also explore some of the following, specific circumstances, and proper U.S. policy responses:

- Indonesia continues its remarkable process of democratization and decentralization, and we join the Indonesian government in welcoming the prospect of durable peace in Aceh. At the same time, concerns persist about accountability for ongoing abuses by some Indonesian security forces, particularly in Papua.
- As exemplified by the visit of the Vietnamese Prime Minister earlier this year, the United States and Vietnam are developing an unprecedented and warming bilateral relationship, with growing trade, security, and people-to-people ties. However, the depth of the relationship is constrained by continuing human rights violations, such as the jailing of dissidents, the attempt to control religious practice, and brutal crackdowns in the Central Highlands.
- Inside Burma, political and humanitarian conditions remain deplorable. I am interested in the State Department's thinking on policy options toward Burma,

including recent, innovative proposals to explore these issues within the context of the UN Security Council.

- In the Philippines, President Arroyo remains politically embattled due to allegations of electoral impropriety, while her country faces challenges from violent insurgents, including Islamist terrorists in Mindanao.
- During his July visit to Washington, Singapore Prime Minister Lee signed a security framework agreement with the United States that should further bolster our robust defense relationship, which already serves as a touchstone of stability in the region.
- On a side issue, I would like to hear more about Cambodia's forced repatriation of Vietnamese Montagnard asylum seekers earlier this summer, and about U.S. efforts to halt or mitigate that circumstance. As you may know, these were issues that I raised in correspondence with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.
- Finally, and most importantly, it is self-evident but not self-apparent in U.S. governmental priorities that the greatest foreign policy issue of our times is neither the problem of war and peace between nation states nor the problem of terrorism, but rather is the very human vulnerability we all share to disease. It is the HIV virus and a potential avian flu pandemic that are more grave life and death issues than those related to armaments and evil intents of mendacious minds. An update on these two issues as they relate to Southeast Asia is critical.

Again, Mr. John, thank you for appearing before the Subcommittee this morning. We look forward to your testimony.

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